



GREEN GROW THE CABBAGES

A Comedy

PHILIP JOHNSON

French's
Acting
Edition

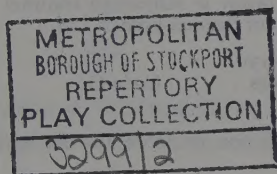
GREEN GROW THE CABBAGES

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A Comedy in One Act

By

PHILIP JOHNSON



SAMUEL



FRENCH

LONDON

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MADE IN ENGLAND

GREEN GROW THE CABBAGES

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JANET COLYNGHAM

NAOMI WAVERTREE

COOK

IRIS

IVY

The play happens in the servants' room of a house in **Lexham Gardens, Kensington**, on an **Autumn morning**.

GREEN GROW THE CABBAGES

The scene is a room in the basement of a house in Lexham Gardens—a room which has already been described in the previous comedies, "Novelette," "Hullabaloo," "Matrimonial" and "Charade."

The lady of the house, prompted by a praiseworthy, humanitarian instinct, has rebelled at the idea of her domestic staff being eternally bound by the four walls of a hot and airless kitchen, and she has therefore set aside this little domain for their rest and refreshment during their leisure hours. It is known as the servants' sitting-room. One sees that it has a window in the centre of the back wall, a fireplace R., and above this a door which leads to the kitchen and the rest of the house. Above this door is an electric bell-indicator. Another door, in the back wall, to L. of the window, admits one to the area and to the joys and sorrows of the outside world. The walls of the room are covered with some quite non-descript paper, and its furnishing is simple. In the centre is a square table, with a straight-backed chair on each side and above it. Beneath the window is a smaller table, and on this a plant or fern. By the fireplace, slightly up stage, is an easy chair, and near the L. wall is a sofa. Both have seen better days. Below the fireplace is a cretonne-covered pouffe. Against the L. wall, below the sofa, is a radio. A small clock stands on the mantelshelf, flanked on either side by "ornaments". The themes of the few pictures have apparently been inspired by the two major passions of love and war : men and maidens lingering by the old trysting-place, or wandering hand-in-hand along marble terraces, share the wall-space with scenes of writhing carnage on the cavalry battlefield. There are, too, a few colourful tradesmen's calendars, and, on the L. wall, above the sofa, a small wall-mirror.

(See the Ground Plan at the end of the Play.)

When the CURTAIN rises, it is the mid-morning of a day in early autumn, and the sole occupant of the room is COOK. She is middle-aged, stout, and would be God's gift to an artist seeking inspiration for one of those advertisements extolling the domestic Nirvana to be achieved through using So-and-So's Soap Flakes, or Thingummy's Meat Cubes. She is seated on the chair above

the table, her elbows and fore-arms resting on the table, reading a newspaper which is spread open in front of her. Beside the newspaper is a cup of tea. A teapot and two empty cups, each with a biscuit in its saucer, are also on the table. The area-door is open about a foot, and, after a moment, a girl's shrill laugh is heard from beyond it. At the sound, COOK raises her head from the newspaper, frowns, and clicks her tongue impatiently.

COOK (over her shoulder ; calling towards the area). Ivy ! Ivy !
(*The only response is another little squeal of laughter. Much louder.*)

Iveeee !! You send that butcher-boy about his business, and come in and shut the door this instant-minute, d'you hear ?

(*There is the sound of a slight scuffle beyond the door, then IVY, her hair untidied, and struggling to repress a giggle, comes in, closing the door behind her. In appearance, she is a nondescript wisp of a thing, of about sixteen.*)

COOK (*twisting sideways in her chair*). Now, see here, how many more times am I to tell you I won't have you wasting your time out there, giggling and gassing with every pipsqueak of a tradesman's lad that comes to the place ? And leaving the door open, too, with me in a draught, that'd blow Nelson off his monument !

IVY (*moving L.*). Sorry, Cook.

COOK. Not that you care ! Ho, no ! I can be a mass of goose-flesh from head to foot, and die through double pneumonia, I suppose, eh ?

IVY. Our mum says that full-blooded women like you usually go off very quick.

COOK (*sharply*). Eh ? What's that ?

IVY (*coming a little down stage*). Like a shot from a gun, our mum says.

COOK. Your mum says ! Oh, she does, does she ? Then, let me tell you this : if your mother had spent less time talking, and more time in teaching her children common-sense, it'd have looked better of her ! And d'you want your elevenses, or don't you ?

IVY. Oh, yes, please, Cook,

COOK. Then get it.

(*IVY moves behind COOK to R. of the table, and pours out a cup of tea. COOK returns to her newspaper. Having poured out her tea, IVY moves a little down R. of the table.*)

Here, wait a minute.

(IVY *pauses*.)

There's a bit here in the paper that fits you to a T. ! Just listen : " Young girl, aged sixteen, found with her throat cut in disused warehouse. Local organist arrested." There, now, you hear that ?

✓ IVY. Yes, Cook, though I don't expect the organist at our church'd ever do a thing like that. He's ever so old, and he's always got a drop on the end of his nose, and a vegetable marrow once fell bang on his head at a harvest festival, and he's been a bit sorta funny ever since. (*She crosses L. in front of the table with her tea, and sits on the sofa.*)

COOK (*during IVY's move*). That's as may be. But one thing leads to another, and I shouldn't wonder if this poor girl wasn't the sort that used to waste her time at back-doors with butchers and bakers and candle-stick-makers, and now look where she's landed herself ! You take my advice, young Ivy, and keep yourself to yourself.

✓ IVY (*busy now with her tea and biscuit*). And never get married at all, or anything ?

COOK. There's time enough for that.

✓ IVY. Our Lily's only a year older than me, and *she's* courting already. It says so on the Methodist Chapel wall : " Lily Burgess goes with Alfie Parker." And our mum doesn't mind a bit. She says it'll be one less mouth to feed.

COOK. Or one more.

✓ IVY. Why ? How ?

COOK (*darkly*). Never you mind. I'm a woman of the world, I am.

✓ IVY (*after taking a drink*). And, anyway, it's only the butcher-lad I like talking to. His hair's all tight little curls, and he's ever so larky. Got an answer for everything. The lad with the greens is always pulling a long face—I don't like him a bit—and the fish sings in the choir and hums hymns all the time.

COOK. He sounds the best of the lot, to me.

IVY. I dare say, but a girl can have too much of *Rock of Ages* and *Abide With Me*.

COOK. And I can have too much of your tongue, miss, and I'll thank you not to go dropping those biscuit crumbs all over the place ! Just *look* at the mess you're making ! (*Looking towards*

R.) And what on earth's happened to Iris? Her tea'll be stone cold.

(IRIS enters, R.)

Oh, here you are! I was just thinking of sending out a search-party.

(IRIS is pretty, has a neat figure, and is quite, quite sure of herself.)

IRIS. I'd have welcomed anything that'd have got me away from that dreary, damn-fool of a woman! Talk, talk, talk! My God, but I never heard anything like it! (She comes to R. of the table.)

COOK. What woman?

IRIS (pouring herself a cup of tea). Why, the mistress's dear old school friend, of course! Miss Naomi Wavertree, that arrived last night, and is staying for a week! And could I get away from her? (She sits.)

COOK. You said she did no more than peck about among the greens at dinner last night. P'raps the poor thing's not very well.

(During the following, IRIS drinks her tea and nibbles her biscuit.)

IRIS. Poor thing, my foot! She's fit as a boat-load of fiddles! She says so, herself. It's us that's all wrong, Cook! Us! Stuffing and gorging ourselves with bleeding flesh-meat, day in and day out! Carrion, that's what we are! Just carrion!

COOK (startled). Eh?

IRIS. Her very words!

COOK (staring at IRIS; struck by a horrid thought; rising abruptly). Iris! Iris, you don't mean to say we've got one of them namby-pamby vegetarians in the house? Oh, don't tell me that!

IRIS (with a nod). Her majesty the queen of the cabbage-patch, dear, no less.

COOK (sitting again). Oh, my God! Oh, my . . . Have I got to spend a whole blessed week, mucking about with lentils and lettuces? Oh, drat the woman! Drat her, I say!

(IVY laughs.)

(She slaps her hand on the table, and almost shouts.) And you stop that row at once, Ivy, before I land you one, d'you hear? (To IRIS.) If there's one thing I hates more than another, Iris, it's

having to codge up a lot of messy dishes out of nuts and greens and olive oil! I do, really! All that washing and rinsing and peeling and paring and chopping! Faugh! I've no patience! Give me the real goods—something that's wagged its tail, and I know where I am. I can do myself justice—eh?

IRIS. That's right.

COOK. But vegetables! The trimmings to a meal, that's all they are! Just the trimmings!

✓ IVY. We've got an allotment at home, we have, and our dad rears lovely vegetables.

COOK. I'm not surprised. A man that'd rear you, 'd rear anything.

IRIS. She's a queer customer altogether, if you ask me, this Miss Wavertree. Ever such a dowdy dresser, too. I wouldn't give her five bob for every rag she has on her.

COOK (*nodding*). Ah. Eccentric, I expect.

IRIS. She looks just the sort that *would* have this here vegetarian fad.

COOK. No, Iris, no, I'd hardly call it a fad, not really; it's more like a sort of a kink.

IRIS. What's the difference? I'd like to know.

COOK (*explaining rather haltingly*). Well, of course, a kink's worse than a fad. I mean, a fad's something you can help if you try; but a kink—well, a kink's more—it's more a part of you, if you see what I mean. And what's more, we've all got 'em, in one shape or another, all of us!

IRIS. I see. Thanks for telling me. I got a kink, you got a kink, all God's chillun got kinks.

✓ IVY. Have I got one, Cook?

COOK. You? You're one big living kink, that's what *you* are! (*To IRIS.*) It's like I once read somewhere: we're none of us really sane, through and through; we've all of us got a—a sort of batty streak in us, somewhere. Look at yourself, for instance!

IRIS. Me? (*Challengingly.*) Well, and what's my kink? Go on! Tell me!

COOK. Uniforms! Any sort of uniform, it doesn't matter what, so long as it's got a man in it! Guardsmen preferred, of course, but bus-conductors not to be sneezed at!

(*IRIS opens her mouth to protest.*)

Now, there's not a bit of use denying! We've all got our little weaknesses, and that's yours, Iris! The merest glimpse of a

soldier and every single thought goes out of your head—except one ! Oh, yes, you may well colour up !

IRIS. Oh, go on with you ! I haven't coloured up !

COOK. I expect it's so long since you blushed, you've forgotten what it feels like. Your face is like a beetroot.

IRIS (*rising*). Oh, tell it to the marines !

COOK. No, Iris, *you* tell 'em. I don't know any marines.

(IRIS starts to go to the fireplace, pauses midway, and turns.)

IRIS. And what about yourself ? If we've all got a weakness, what's yours ? A Guinness ?

COOK. No, Miss Smarty, it is not ! My weakness, since you ask, is working and slaving myself to a shadow, and sacrificing myself for others ! That's me all over !

IRIS. Oh, yeah ? (*She goes towards the fireplace.*)

COOK. Oh, yeah ! I can talk American, too.

IVY. So can I ! (*With a film-American accent.*) Say, buddy, you can't do this to me ! No, sir !

COOK. Be quiet, Ivy, will you ! (*To IRIS.*) Take the master, now.

IRIS (*turning*). Eh ?

COOK. Him and his tulips ! Now, there's a kink, if you like—tulips ! Thinks and talks and reads of nothing but—tulips ! Nobody's fonder of flowers than I am, but when it comes to paying a hundred pounds for a bit of a bulb, then it's time to cry "halt !" —as your guardsmen would say.

IRIS (*taking one step towards R.C.*). A hundred pounds ?

COOK. Madam told me so, herself. Seven of 'em. Seven hundred pounds at one smack. It's money, you know, that is !

IRIS. You're telling me ! What couldn't I do with it ! (*She turns and sits on the L. arm of the easy-chair.*)

COOK. And all that land he's bought out in the country, to grow the blessed things on ! And all on account of a kink !

IRIS. It sounds more like a mania, to me.

COOK. Kinks, fads, fancies and manias, there's more of 'em outside the asylums than ever there are in ! (*Rising somewhat ponderously.*) Oh, well, this won't buy baby a new bonnet !

(IVY, *tipping her head back, noisily drains the last drop of tea from her cup.*)

Ivy ! My goodness me ! What next ? (*Going to her and snatching the cup from her hand.*) Here, you give that to me !

And in case you don't know, that thing in your face is a mouth, not a suction-pump ! (*Returning to L. of the table.*) Talk about manners ! (*She slams the cup down on the table.*) Come on, Iris, we're late ! The morning's half done ! Quick march, as your Horse Guard friends would say !

IRIS (*rising, moving to the table and placing her cup and saucer on it*). My Horse Guard friends, as you call them, don't march : they're always on horses.

COOK. Always ? You must find that awkward at times. (*To IVY.*) Ivy, are you still sitting there ? What d'you think this place is—a holiday camp ? Come on ! Get cracking !

(*IVY rises, takes a small tin tray which is leaning against the upstage end of the sofa, and carries it above the table.*)

COOK (*through IVY's move*). Madam's late, too. She's usually down long before this, to talk about meals.

IRIS. If Miss Batty Wavertree's got hold of her, you can expect her when you see her. That woman'd talk the hind leg off every donkey on Margate beach.

COOK. Take these things out and wash 'em, Ivy—and don't let me catch you scraping your finger round the bottom of the cups after the sugar !

IVY (*placing the cups and saucers on the tray and picking it up*). In the café kitchen where our Lily works, everything's done by machinery.

COOK. There's no machinery needed here. I've still got the use of my hands, as you'll find to your cost, if you don't look sharp ! Open the door for her, Iris, or there'll be a smash.

(*IRIS goes to the door up R., and opens it. IVY goes out, carrying the tray. IRIS crosses to the wall-mirror and studies her reflection.*)

COOK. These bits of young girls are more trouble than they're worth. That young Ivy's the hair in my mulligatawny, all right. And I wish I'd a pound for every time you look at yourself in that mirror, Iris.

IRIS. If you must know, I'm wondering whether ear-rings would suit me.

COOK (*taking the newspaper from the table, folding it, and crossing to the sofa*). Ear-rings ? Mrs Jessop, that plays the piano in the Pembroke Arms lounge bar on Saturday nights, has got a lovely pair ; one's a little boy on a swing, and the other's a little girl. (*Stuffing the paper behind a cushion.*) Real exquisite, they are.

IRIS (*moving away towards the table, with a final pat to her hair*). I've no wish to look like a pub piano-player, thanks very much.

COOK. You couldn't if you tried. Mrs Jessop may have come down in the world, but she's a lady.

IRIS. Is that so? I'd sooner look like a girl that's gone up, than a lady that's come down. And it strikes me you're very scratchy this morning, Cook. Got out of bed the wrong side, if you ask me. (*He goes up to the window, and looks out.*)

COOK. I didn't ask you. (*She sits down heavily upon the sofa.*) But if you must know, this is one of my down-in-the-depths days. (*She sighs.*)

IRIS (*turning*). Down in the what?

COOK. Depths! It's the way I'm made, Iris. I can't help it. One day I'm light and airy as my own puff-pastry, and the next I'm flat and leathery as a café pancake. All artists are like that: temperamental, it's called.

IRIS. What artists?

COOK. Me, for one.

(IRIS gives a short laugh.)

Oh, you may laugh! You're only showing your ignorance! A gentleman that lived in a mews once said to me: "A lady that can cook a meal like you is as real an artist as the best picture-painter that ever breathed." He'd just borrowed seven-and-six off me, I remember, to help him to bury his auntie. (*Another laugh.*) Oh dear, it seems a long time ago. Those days are gone.

IRIS (*sitting on the edge of the table*). Along with your seven-and-six, I expect.

COOK (*looking at her*). You know, Iris, the trouble with you is, you've got no soul. No more soul than a cabbage, you haven't.

IRIS (*examining her nails*). Oh? Fancy that!

COOK. A modern girl, I suppose you'd call yourself, eh? In other words, hard as nails!

IRIS. And why not?

COOK (*shaking her head sadly*). I used to know a lovely bit of poetry, and many's the album I've wrote it in: "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever."

IRIS (*standing*). We've changed all that. (*Crossing to the fireplace.*) Nowadays, it's—be clever, sweet maid, and let who will be good.

COOK (*incensed*). Really, Iris, I call that a downright wicked thing to say! Yes, I do! And if there were any justice in this world, the roof'd fall on you this very minute!

(*There is a loud crockery-crash from off R.*)

COOK (*springing up*). Oh, my God! Hear that? (*Crossing hurriedly to R. ; shouting.*) Here! Here, I say! What's all this, eh? What's all this? (*She flings open the door up R., and shouts.*) What's gone wrong now? You and your great hands like fire-shovels! Another attack of dropsy, eh? What have you smashed this time? Come on! You needn't try to hide! I can see you, skulking there! (*Suddenly checking herself, backing a step, with a complete change of tone.*) Oh—oh, I'm ever so sorry, madam—I'd no idea—I thought it was. . .

(MRS COLYNGHAM (JANET) enters. *She is nearer to fifty than forty, a typical Kensington matron, well-dressed and well-groomed.*)

JANET (*entering*). Good-morning, Cook. Did I startle you? (*She moves above the table.*) I was bringing those three chipped tumblers down, to be thrown away. They slipped out of my hand, and smashed on the stone stairs.

COOK (*above and R. of JANET*). There, now. Never mind, madam. It can't be helped. Accidents will happen. Don't stand there, Iris! Go and help that there Ivy to sweep up the bits.

(*IRIS exits up R.*)

JANET (*moving round, L. of the table*). I should have been down much earlier, Cook, but I was having a little talk with Miss Wavertree—a very dear old school-friend, you know—we were at Madame Lafontaine's together, in Paris—*such* an interesting talk—I just couldn't tear myself away.

COOK (*above the chair R. of the table*). That's right, madam. There's nothing like a chat over old times. I met an old school-friend of mine, the other day. Pushing a flower-barrow down the Earl's Court Road, she was, and a proper old gas we had, I can tell you! And believe it or not, madam, when we came out, if someone hadn't pinched a bunch of madonna lilies and a potted palm!

JANET. When you came out?

COOK (*hastily*). When we turned our backs for a minute, I should say.

JANET. I see. (*Drawing out the chair L. of the table.*) But about Naomi—Miss Wavertree—you'll like her *so* much. She'll be down here at any moment, to have a little talk with you.

COOK (*unenthusiastically*). Yes, madam.

JANET. A charming woman, utterly sincere and—and unspoilt, and full, simply *full*, of the most revealing ideas and theories.

COOK (*as before*). Yes, madam . . . She's a lady vegetarian, I understand.

JANET. She is, indeed ! Vegetarianism is part of the beautiful pattern of life which Naomi has created for herself.

COOK. Oh, well, I'll have to see what I can do for her. (*With heavy sarcasm.*) Lamb and green peas, p'raps, without the lamb.

JANET (*sitting, with a rather forced laugh*). Oh dear, it does sound a little like *Hamlet*, without the prince, doesn't it ? Never mind. You'll contrive something quite wonderful, I know. It's as I'm always telling my friends : " Give my cook the straw, and she'll make the bricks, all right."

(*A split-second of silence. Then :*)

COOK (*in an ominous tone*). Bricks, madam ? Bricks, did you say ?

JANET (*reacting to COOK's expression*). Why, yes—er—it's a proverb, you know.

COOK (*in high dudgeon*). Proverb or not, if there's any complaints about my puddings and pastries being heavy, then I'd like to be told so quite open and straight-forward, and not hinted at ! (*She turns quickly, and marches to the door up R., as though to go out.*)

JANET (*jumping up and hurrying after her*). But, my dear Cook—no, wait—wait, please !

COOK (*swinging round in the doorway*). If there's one thing I can't abide, it's hintings and double-meanings ! No ! What I always say is, if anyone's got anything to say, then let them say so and say it, that's what *I* say ! I never beat about the bush myself, and I'll thank other people not to beat about the bush with me !

JANET (*trying to break in*). But, Cook, really, I do assure you . . .

COOK. And as for my pastry being like a brick, I do my best, and I can't do more ! If I'd two pairs of hands, I might do better, but as I haven't, I can't, and there it is !

JANET. Yes, yes, I know—but, Cook, I never said a word about your pastry ! I adore your pastry ! I tell *all* my friends that you make *the* most wonderful pastry in the world ! I never *stop* talking about your pastry ! Why, you're famous all over Kensington for your pastry, everybody knows that !

COOK (*somewhat mollified, but not immediately giving in*). Oh—

well—I'm not one for puffing myself up, and never was.

JANET. No, no, of course not.

COOK. Or for blowing my own trumpet—but one thing I will say—I'm conscientious.

JANET. That's just what I'm *always* saying: "Cook's so conscientious!"

COOK (*moving a little down R., below the easy-chair*). I'm not boasting about it—it's how I'm made—I am, and always have been—conscientious.

JANET. No one more so. (*Easing above the chair R. of the table.*) And—and, Cook, I've just remembered something—the black fox fur I bought two years ago—I'm not quite sure that it suits me—and so I'm going to give it to you. There, now!

COOK (*the sun breaking through the clouds*). Oh, madam! Not that lovely fox fur? Oh, but that's ever so good of you! It is, really!

JANET. I'm so glad you're pleased.

COOK. Oh, I am, ever so! And now about lunch, madam. I don't know why, but all of a sudden I feel I'd like to do something a bit special today.

JANET. Oh, yes—about lunch—well, now, I think perhaps we'll have our little chat with Miss Wavertree first, and then decide, shall we?

COOK (*easing to the fireplace and looking at the clock*). Just as you say, madam; but time's getting on.

JANET. She should have been here by now. Hush! I thought I heard . . .

COOK. Somebody on the stairs.

JANET. It'll be . . . (*Hurrying R. to the doorway.*) Yes, here she is! (*Calling.*) Naomi darling, here we are! In here!

(*She moves a little away from the doorway, as MISS WAVERTREE (NAOMI) enters. She is a tall, thin woman, with rather sharp features, and is about the same age as JANET. Her dress is plain, and of some sort of hand-woven material, and she wears sandals on her stockingless feet. Her sole ornaments are a string of wooden beads and a posy made of nuts and bits of leather.*)

NAOMI (*entering and coming R.C.*). Darling, I've been having *such* a beautiful talk with your husband! He's been telling me all about his wonderful tulip hobby, and, really, it is fascinating, isn't it? I'd no idea!

JANET. Norbert loves to talk to people about his tulips. He simply lives for them.

NAOMI. I'm sure that he does. But what I can't understand is, how a man with such an intense feeling for beauty, can ever be a meat-eater. I mean, how can he feast his soul on a glowing field of tulips one minute and tear dead animals to bits with his teeth the next?

JANET. Oh, I expect lots of people are like that, really . . . Er—this is Cook.

NAOMI (*to COOK*). How-do-you-do?

COOK. How-do-you-do, miss?

NAOMI (*crossing JANET to down c.*). And this—this, I suppose, is the kitchen?

JANET. No, no, dear, this is the maids' sitting-room. (*She moves to R. of the table, above the chair.*) Quite a cosy little room, don't you think?

NAOMI (*looking round and moving L. of the table*). Quite—oh, quite—but the walls should be green. A pale, soft green can be almost unbelievably helpful. (*Going up stage.*) Do you mind if I fling the window open?

COOK. You can't, miss. That window's been stuck ever since the painters were here.

NAOMI. The door, then. I must open something. In a room without air I'm like a flower in a bone-dry vase: I droop. (*She goes to the area-door and flings it wide, then takes a deep breath through her nose and exhales noisily through her mouth.*) Aaaaaaaah! (*She moves away from the door.*)

COOK. I'm afraid you'll find it a bit draughty, miss.

NAOMI (*coming down L. of the table below the chair*). Draughty? Good, clean air in rapid motion, that's all! There's nothing I like better than a brisk, healthy draught!

COOK (*aggrievedly*). I dare say, miss, but I happen to be prone to earache.

NAOMI. Then you should be ashamed to admit it! My dear good woman, ninety per cent of the aches and pains of this world are caused through wrong living! They should be made criminal offences! People should be gaoled for harbouring them!

COOK. Oh?

JANET (*somewhat hastily; sensing COOK's reaction*). Darling, your ideas are very, very wonderful. I know that they are! But you must remember that we're only novitiates, as yet. We find your advanced views a wee bit startling, just at first.

NAOMI. Advanced ? But that's just what they're not ! I tell you, our only hope is to go back, back to the very beginning of things, and start all over again ! Simple, hygienic clothing—this dress I'm wearing now—look at it—woven from pure goat-wool.

JANET. I was wondering what it was. Just fancy. Pure goat.

COOK. I didn't know there was such a thing.

NAOMI. And, of course, simple food ! Roots, fruits, nuts and herbs ! Nature's sublime and lovely merchandise ! What, now, could be better ?

COOK. Fruit didn't do Adam and Eve much good, miss, according to what I've been told.

NAOMI. I always say, it was waxed fruit they ate, from some ugly, stuffy Victorian drawing-room—and the world has been ugly and stuffy ever since.

JANET (*half-laughing, half-admiringly*). You know, dear, you do think of the most extraordinarily clever things—you do, really !

NAOMI. And why ? Because I keep my brain alert and crystal-clear on a vegetable diet and don't gorge myself stupid on dead animal matter !

JANET (*protestingly*). Naomi dear ! (*Moving below the easy-chair.*) It—it does sound so horrible, the way you put it.

NAOMI. It is horrible !

JANET (*turning*). And, anyway, I don't gorge myself ! You know I don't.

(NAOMI shakes her head.)

What do you mean ?

NAOMI (*still shaking her head*). Janet dear, if only you could have *seen* yourself after dinner last night ! I couldn't get the picture of you out of my mind. It kept me awake half the night.

JANET. Why ? What was wrong with me ?

NAOMI. Everything ! Stupified with butcher-meat, you flopped into an easy-chair, your figure sagging all over the place, your face all flushed, and your eyes all dull and glazed—when you managed to keep them open !

JANET. Naomi ! It isn't true ! You—you're inventing it !

NAOMI. I only wish I could have had your portrait painted as you sat there, and plastered on the walls of every town and village in the land, as a warning : *Portrait of a Gorged Meat-Eater.* (*She turns up to above the L. end of the table.*)

JANET (*sinking down into the easy-chair*). No—please—please, I don't want to hear any more !

NAOMI. You've got one thing to be thankful for, Janet, just one.

JANET. And what's that? Tell me—quickly!

NAOMI. Your husband's passion for tulips. If it hadn't been tulips, it might so easily have been another woman—and who could have blamed him?

JANET (*faintly*). Oh!

COOK (*who, throughout this, has been standing down R., visibly bridling; suddenly bursting out*). Rubbish!

NAOMI. What?

COOK. Rubbish, I said, and rubbish I meant—yes, if I'm to be struck dead this very minute for saying it! (*Going to L. of JANET's chair, and turning to her.*) You take my tip, madam, and don't go upsetting yourself! There isn't a thing wrong with you! And as for your figure, what of it? A bit of middle-aged spread, that's all!

JANET (*wincing*). Middle-aged spread!

COOK. And why not? Believe it or not, but I used to be known as "Fairy," and every ready-made I ever bought had to be took in round the hips! And look at me now! But I don't worry—what's the use? You may cheat a bit at this and cheat a bit at that, but you can't cheat good old anno domini! (*Easing above the table, and turning there.*) Yes! It's the same with you, madam, and after all . . .

JANET (*springing up*). No—no, please, Cook—don't say any more! (*Moving to the fireplace.*) I—I can't bear it! I just can't bear it!

NAOMI (*moving L. of the chair L. of the table*). Now don't get agitated, darling—it does horrid things to your arteries—and don't look too shattered. While there's life there's hope, and there's still time for you to take yourself in hand, if only you do it *now*—this very day.

JANET (*anxiously; taking a pace or two away from the fireplace*). You . . . Naomi, you really think so? You do? Truly?

NAOMI. But of course I do! The remedy is in your own hands—turn over a new leaf—and let it be a fresh, crisp lettuce leaf.

(JANET, *looking extremely shaken, takes another pace towards R.C., as IRIS appears in the doorway up R.*)

IRIS. Excuse me, please . . . (*She moves up R.C.*) Cook, is the dustpan in here?

COOK. No, it isn't!

(IRIS turns to go.)

NAOMI. Just a moment ! You're Iris, aren't you ?

(IRIS checks, unwillingly.)

Wait a minute, please ! We had a cosy little chat together just now, you and I, didn't we ?

IRIS (*with a suggestion of lingering resentment*). I'd hardly call it a chat, miss. You asked me a lot of questions. And if you'll excuse me, I've got my dusting to do. (*She half turns to go.*)

NAOMI (*moving below the L. end of the table, a shade louder—the voice of the fanatic is heard in the land*). Then you'd better begin by dusting your own life, hadn't you ?

IRIS (*indignantly ; moving a little down R.C.*). I beg your pardon !

NAOMI. Oh, come, come ! One has only to look at you to see that you're carnivorous !

COOK. Eh ?

IRIS (*crossing to NAOMI*). I'm what ?

(COOK eases to R. of the chair above the table.)

NAOMI. A meat-eater ! A devourer of animal flesh ! Carnivorous ! (*Grasping IRIS's arm above the elbow and pinching it.*) Ha ! As I thought ! Flabby !

IRIS (*shrilly ; pulling herself free and retreating a pace*). Here ! Here, I say, that'll do ! That'll do, if you please ! What next I'd like to know ? (*Turning towards JANET.*) Telling me I'm dusty and flabby and calling me nasty names . . . (*She turns to NAOMI again.*)

NAOMI (*shaking her head, a reformer momentarily disheartened by the blind stupidity of the world*). Oh, Iris—oh, Iris, why must you be so silly ? (*She turns away up L. in despair.*)

IRIS (*with increasing shrillness*). Silly, now, am I ? Thanks very much ! Just a silly, dusty, flabby carni—what's-it ! So now we know ! (*Turning to JANET, moving to R.C.*) Madam—madam—you heard her—you saw—and it isn't fair—just because I'm an honest working-girl, insulting me, and pinching me into the bargain. (*Working herself up to hysterical tears.*) I don't care what anybody says, madam, it isn't right—it isn't right ! The law's for the poor as well as the rich, and I'm not here to be trampled on. (*With a wail.*)

JANET (*distracted by her own worries*). Oh, Iris, do be quiet, please !

{IRIS, *weeping and wailing, crosses to the sofa and sinks down, sobbing noisily.*}

COOK (*hurrying down below NAOMI to IRIS ; soothingly*). There, now ! There now, dear ! Don't take on so ! Don't upset yourself ! It isn't worth it ! (*Sitting above IRIS, her arm round her, and speaking across to JANET.*) It's a sin and a shame, madam, it is really, upsetting the poor little thing like this, and her coming in as innocent as a daisy and asking for no more than a dust-pan. Frightening her !

NAOMI (*moving about up L.C.*). Frightening her ? But, good heavens, who's frightened her ? Who ?

JANET (*below the R. end of the table, working to C.*). Iris, do pull yourself together, please ! Try to stop crying, do ! You'll make yourself quite ill !

. (*IRIS wriggles her shoulders, and sobs even louder.*)

NAOMI. Really, I've no patience ! I tell the girl a few home-truths, and she promptly goes to pieces and starts howling the place down !

(*JANET, distracted, turns away and up R.C. in despair.*)

COOK. There's a right way and a wrong way of telling people things, and Iris is sensitive and highly-strung, like me. My nerves are drawn out like piano wires, some days you could play a tune on 'em, almost. (*To JANET.*) We'll look well if she has hysterics, like the time she found a beetle in her slipper ! (*To IRIS.*) There, dear, there ! It's all right ! Everything's all right now !

NAOMI (*with a wide gesture*). You see, Janet ? (*Easing up R.C.*) A modern young woman ! Just an unco-ordinated tangle of raw, jangling inhibitions ! A pretty outlook for the future of the race !

JANET (*going up R.C. to her hastily*). Yes, yes, dear, but—I wouldn't say any more, not just now ! No, please ! Let's—I know—let's talk about lunch, shall we ? Yes—lunch !

COOK (*her arm still round IRIS, whose sobs are dwindling into the gasping and snuffling stage*). Lunch, did you say ? After all this upset, I'm not sure I'll be able to cope with it ! I'm sorry, madam, but there it is ! The way I feel, a cutlet'd turn to cinders while I looked at it.

NAOMI (*looking across at COOK*). You don't have to cope with lunch. I'm going to. And there will be no cutlets.

COOK (*removing her arm from IRIS*). Eh?

JANET (*hastily easing above the chair R. of the table*). Yes, Cook, Miss Wavertree has very kindly offered to prepare a vegetarian lunch—er—just for us to try, you know.

NAOMI (*above and L. of JANET*). So you may take a little holiday, Cook. Put on a pair of sensible shoes, go for a long walk, and let the wind blow through your hair!

COOK (*rising ; ungraciously*). Thanks very much, I'm sure. (*She moves to L.C.*)

NAOMI (*moving towards the door up R.*). Is the kitchen through here? Ah, yes, I see! And now, to work, to work! (*Turning near the doorway, facing into the room, reciting with dramatic effect.*)

" The spinach of old England
Shall grace our groaning board,
With turnips diced,
And carrots sliced,
From Nature's bounteous hoard!

Away with beer!
In water clear,
We'll toast a fruitful future!
So up with the leaf,
And down with the beef!
And devil take the butcher!"

JANET. Oh, that's *very* good, dear. So—so *rousing*!

NAOMI. It came to me quite in a flash, one morning, between sleeping and waking. Now, let me see, I shall require, among other things, lentils, carrots, a swede or two, the juice of a blood orange, a bay-leaf, a little posy of parsley, and a few onions.

COOK. There's no *onions*, I can tell you straight. They forgot to send any.

NAOMI. No onions? (*Undauntedly.*) Then I must contrive without them, mustn't I? And if I don't dish up the most delicious lunch you've ever tasted, I'll eat my hat.

(*She goes out.*)

COOK. I'll probably be only too glad to eat mine—the one with the pheasant's wing on it. (*To JANET.*) Well, madam, this is a queer state of affairs, if you please! Turned out of my own kitchen, no less!

JANET. Oh, but you mustn't look at it like that. (*Moving up, above the R. end of the table.*) It's—it's just a little experiment. Now—now, why not do as Miss Wavertree says, and go for a nice long walk in Kensington Gardens?

COOK. No, thank you, madam. It might give me an appetite, and it strikes me that's the last thing I'll be wanting. (*To IRIS.*) Are you feeling better, dear?

IRIS (*sniffing into a handkerchief which she has produced from her apron-pocket*). A bit.

COOK (*to JANET*). Poor girl, being spoken to and knocked about like that—it was a shock to her system. After all, madam, she's got her feelings, same as anyone else.

JANET. Yes, yes, I know; but Miss Wavertree doesn't mean any harm. It's—it's just her way. She's a genius, really, and all geniuses are just a little peculiar. We have to make allowances.

COOK (*easing down, L. of the table*). That's all very well, madam . . .

JANET. Ssh!

(*NAOMI appears in the open doorway.*)

NAOMI. Is there an artichoke in the house?

COOK. No.

NAOMI. Oh. (*Turning to go, then turning again.*) Oh, by the way, there's a strange, half-witted girl in the kitchen, with iodine deficiency and complicated glands.

COOK. That's Ivy, that is, and Ivy happens to be kitchen-maid. Maybe that's why she's in the kitchen. Stranger things have happened.

NAOMI. Ivy? Then please ask her to go away and cling to an old wall, or something. She keeps staring at me as though I were some sort of freak.

(*She goes out.*)

JANET (*hurrying after her*). Darling—darling, please, mayn't I help? Isn't there anything I can do?

(*She exits.*)

COOK (*looking towards the open doorway; gloweringly*). Anything she can do! I know what I'd like to do! (*Burlesquing NAOMI'S voice.*) H'is there a h'artichoke in the house? (*In her own voice.*) No, there isn't! But there's a lovely tin of weed-killer in the coal-shed! Go on! Help yourself!

(IRIS is still sniffing spasmodically, and giving a few final dabs at her nose.)

Now, Iris, you've done quite enough of that. Just look at yourself. Here you are, with your afternoon off, and your eyes so bunged up you'll hardly be able to tell a guardsman from a Chelsea pensioner!

IRIS. I don't care. It isn't fair. (*Rising.*) Who does she think she is, anyway? I'd like to know! Treating me as if I was a coal-black slave! Someone should tell her this isn't Uncle Tom's Cabin!

COOK. That isn't the only thing they should tell her.

(IVY appears in the doorway.)

(*She moves C. below the table.*) Well, Ivy? What's *your* trouble?

IVY (*moving in to R.C.*). The lady doesn't want me in the kitchen any more.

COOK. I know. She's been complaining you keep staring at her. Sends cold shivers down her back, she says.

IVY (*coming down a little*). A cat may look at a king. (*Easing R.*) I used to write that in my copy-book, I did.

COOK. I dare say; but a king's only a king. (*A jerk of her head towards off R.*) She's a genius.

IVY. I thought geniuses always played pianos.

COOK. She's the kind that plays havoc, instead. (*To IRIS.*) And that's God's truth, too, Iris, and don't I know it? I've seen it happen, more than once.

IRIS (*easing L.C. towards the table*). What?

COOK. A happy, contented house, with everybody peaceful and comfortable as can be. And then somebody turns up with a lot of airy-fairy, new-fangled notions and starts telling 'em the way they're living's all wrong, and before you know where you are, hell's let loose, and, like as not, the home broke up!

IRIS. I'd like to break her up—with a hatchet! (*Starting to move up L., replacing her handkerchief in her pocket.*) And to think of her, here for a week. My God!

COOK. A month of wet Sundays'll be nothing, compared. (*Crossing to L.*) And do, for goodness sake, shut that door. This room's like the end of Southend pier in mid-winter!

(IRIS closes the area-door.)

You know, Iris, I'm worried. I'm just wondering what all this is going to lead to.

IRIS. All what ?

COOK (*with a wave of her hand towards off R.*). All that.

IRIS (*moving above the table, with a shrug*). A lunch we wouldn't touch with a barge-pole, and baked beans on toast for my tea at the dear old Corner House. Thank God it is my afternoon off.

(COOK *shakes her head.*)

What ?

COOK. If that's all, it means, I shall be thankful. But you know what madam is : her kink is that she's always liable to catch other folks's kinks. They get in her hair and under her nails. I only wish I'd a pound for every fresh damn-fool craze she's taken up since I first came here. We've all got bats in our belfry, I know ; but she's got a big notice outside hers : "All bats welcomed, and the battier the better." If she isn't an out-and-out vegetarian by this time tomorrow, it'll cheat me—and then where are we ?

IRIS. So far as I'm concerned, anywhere but here.

COOK. I could never keep body and soul together on green stuff, and it's not a bit of use asking me to. You might as well stick me in a rabbit-hutch, and have done with it ! I need proper nourishment, I do.

IVY. So do I. Our mum says I want building up, or I'll over-grow my strength, our mum says.

(*Taking the first "Our mum says" as her cue, NAOMI has re-appeared in the open doorway.*)

NAOMI. Your mother's spared no effort to turn you into a complete congenital idiot. She should be shot !

(IVY, uttering a startled "Oh !" has swung round, and is staring at her, open-mouthed. COOK and IRIS do not move.)

NAOMI. And, for heaven's sake, child, close your mouth, if you can ! I can almost see your adenoids ! Cook, I want some candied-peel, if you please.

COOK (*very offhandedly*). If there's any left, you'll find it in a jar marked "Sultanas."

NAOMI. Which reminds me, I shall require sultanas, too. You have some, I suppose ?

COOK. I really couldn't say. If you look in the jar marked "Candied-Peel"—I dunno—you might be lucky.

NAOMI. And—let me see—oh, yes—walnuts.

COOK. There aren't any.

NAOMI. I'd better look for myself. You told me there weren't any onions, but I found some lovely ones.

COOK. Onions? And I could have sworn there wasn't a single onion in the place, neither Spring nor Spanish! Onions, eh? I must have forgot!

NAOMI. Of course you forgot! What else can you expect, with your body and brain all sluggish and clogged with animal matter? The onions were there, staring at you all the time! Onions, just asking to be peeled and chopped!

(As she turns to go, she notices the closed area-door. Marching determinedly to it, she flings it wide open, then goes back to the door up R., and exits. There is a tiny pause, then COOK rises, goes to the area-door, and slams it to.)

COOK *(turning her back to the closed door)*. In all my career as a cook, this is the first time I've ever longed—yes, really longed—for a few rotten eggs. *(Coming a little down stage.)* That woman—that woman! It's like having a raging typhoon in the house!

IVY. You mean a harpoon, Cook, don't you? A typhoon's what you catch whales with . . . at least, I think it is.

COOK *(very irritably)*. Oh, be quiet, Ivy, do! Harpoons! Typhoons! Really, this place gets more like a mad-house every blessed minute! *(Turning to IRIS.)* Iris, this is the end! Mark my solemn words, this—is—the—end! *(After pausing.)* Iris, tell me, how do you spell Ashby-de-la-Zouche?

IRIS. Eh? Why?

COOK. There's a lady there been hankering and angling after me for years. I shall write to her this very afternoon. Widow of a wealthy pork-butcher, she is. No vegetarian nonsense there! Ashby-de-la-Zouche!

IVY *(with a giggle)*. It sounds more like a sneeze than a name, doesn't it?

COOK. Oh, Ivy, do stop it, will you! *(To IRIS.)* It isn't as if the master'll be any help, either. Most men'd raise hell's delight, but not him! His brain's so stuffed full of tulips, he never seems to notice what he's shoving into his mouth. Like as not, he could turn vegetarian and never know it.

(A bell rings.)

There, now!

IRIS *(glancing at the indicator)*. That's him! The master's

study! (*She hastily pats her hair. To COOK.*) Oh dear. How do I look?

COOK. Awful.

IRIS. Oh, Cook!

COOK. What's it matter, anyway? You'd have to have tulips sprouting out of your head before he'd look at you twice. Oh, go on, Iris, do, and see what he wants! Don't stand there!

IRIS. Oh...

(*Still patting her hair, she hurries out. COOK goes to the sofa, seizes a cushion, gives it a vicious shake, then replaces it. IVY wanders a little upstage. Then:*)

✓ IVY. It's turned out a funny sort of morning, hasn't it, Cook?

COOK. Funny?

✓ IVY. Well—a strange lady cooking in the kitchen, and you with nothing to do but twiddle your thumbs.

COOK (*grimly*). I mayn't have much to do, but I've plenty to think about. (*Ominously.*) Oh, yes! And why don't you find something to do, instead of lounging about?

✓ IVY. Well, what *can* I do, if I'm not to go into the kitchen?

COOK. God knows!

(*Another very brief pause.*)

✓ IVY. I wish it was lunch-time. I'm ever so hungry.

(*COOK gives what can only be described as a hollow laugh.*)

✓ I don't see much to laugh at in feeling hungry.

COOK (*checking her laughter*). You'll see even less before this day's out, my girl. (*She starts to rummage about among some old magazines and newspapers on the sofa.*) Where's that old railway-guide that used to be here?

✓ IVY. It got thrown away.

COOK. Oh, drat! I wanted to see how they spell that place. I can manage the Ashby all right; it's when I come to the Zouche that I'm stumped. Why couldn't the woman have lived at York or Leeds or Tring—somewhere easy? (*Moving away from the sofa and looking towards off R.*) I don't care what madam or anybody says, it isn't *right*! A strange woman, playing fast and loose in my kitchen! Who knows where she'll go rummaging and poking her nose? After all, we all have our own little

private odds and ends.

(IVY giggles.)

And what may you be sniggering at?

IVY. I was wondering if she'd find that bottle you've hidden behind the bread-bin.

COOK. Eh? And what have you been ferreting behind the bread-bin for, miss, eh? If I like a drop of something handy for my stomach's sake, that's my business!

IVY (*hearing a sound from off stage*). Sst! Someone's opened the kitchen door!

JANET (*off*). Darling, it looks delicious! I can hardly bear to wait until lunch-time.

IVY (*hastily*). She's coming!

(IVY moves quickly up c., watching the door. COOK is standing a little up stage of the sofa. JANET enters.)

JANET. Oh, Cook—Cook, I wonder if we could have a little talk. You're not busy? (*She moves a little down R.C.*)

COOK. Busy, madam? Me? (*Moving above the chair, L. of the table.*) What have I got to be busy about?

JANET. No, no, of course not!

COOK (*gloomily*). A pair of idle hands, all ripe for Satan—that's me this morning, madam, and no mistake.

JANET (*with a little forced laugh*). Oh—oh, come, we must hope not, mustn't we? (*To IVY.*) Ivy, go into the scullery, and—and see if you can't find some little task.

(*A very short pause. IVY goes out.*)

JANET (*obviously not too sure of how her announcement is going to be received*). Well—well, Cook—the fact is, I—I've come to a very great decision.

COOK. Yes, madam.

JANET. Yes . . . I've discussed the vegetarian question with my friend Naomi, and she's persuaded me to—to take the bull by the horns, as it were.

COOK. Bull, madam? Really? It seems a funny thing for a vegetarian to advise.

JANET (*with another little forced laugh*). Well—the cabbage by the stalk, then, shall we say?

COOK. Meaning, you've decided to turn vegetarian yourself?

(JANET gives one emphatic nod.)

I see.

JANET (*very firmly, as she moves up R.C. and turns, above the chair R. of the table*). Not another ounce of flesh, fish or fowl shall ever again darken the doors of this house! On that, Cook, I am quite determined.

COOK. Ah. (*She moves down a pace or two, L.C.*)

JANET. After all—I mean, when you come to think of it—in all the world can there be a more revolting sight than a butcher's shop, crammed full of corpses and carcasses? I ask you!

COOK. Yes, madam, there can: an empty butcher's shop on a Saturday night, when you've left your shopping too late!

JANET. But—but it is so ugly, isn't it? Raw meat! You must admit it's brutally ugly, Cook. And vegetables are so pretty, some of them. They're—they're such *fun*! Such *fun*!

COOK. Are they? I'd like to see a working-man's face if his wife said: "There's nothing but greens for your dinner today. Isn't it fun!"

(*Momentarily baffled by COOK's uncompromising attitude, JANET looks at her, then moves a little down stage, R.C.*)

JANET. You know, Cook, I'm just the teeniest bit disappointed in you. I was hoping you'd be a little more—well, more co-operative and helpful.

COOK (*at L.C., slightly down stage to JANET*). I'm sorry, madam, but there it is, and you must excuse me. I've been used to one kind of cooking all my life, and I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks.

JANET. Oh, nonsense! Too old, indeed! Why, I'm sure you don't look a day over fifty-five.

COOK (*stiffly*). If anyone's really interested, I shall be fifty next birthday.

JANET (*hastily*). Yes, yes, of course! How silly of me! I meant forty-five, Cook, forty-five. (*Moving below the table L.C.*) And as to learning new tricks, don't give it a second thought. Naomi knows of a wonderful Vegetarian Cookery School, in the Cromwell Road, and I shall arrange for you to take a course. (*She pauses.*)

(*COOK remains silent.*)

You'll enjoy it, you know. You'll meet *such* nice people, and—(*brightly*) and you'll be able to wear those lovely furs I'm giving you, won't you?

COOK (*bleakly, not looking at JANET*). Thank you, madam—but I don't know.

JANET. What do you mean—you don't know?

COOK. I'll have to think about it.

JANET (*her patience suddenly beginning to wear thin*). But—but I've already done all the necessary thinking, myself, and my mind couldn't be more made up! And not a minute too soon! (*Moving nearer to COOK.*) Do you realize that for years and years I've been wallowing and floundering in a morass of wrong living?

COOK. No, madam.

JANET. Well, I have. I'm like an engine that's been stoked with the wrong sort of fuel, and I'm beginning to run down—Naomi says so, and Naomi's right! I'm not half the woman I used to be!

COOK. I thought you were worrying because you're a few pounds more than the woman you used to be.

JANET. Don't quibble, please. That's all I ask, don't quibble.

COOK. I don't care! It's enough to make a saint quibble—whatever that may be.

JANET. What?

COOK. Well, it is! Here have I been cooking all my life, and now I'm told I must go to some fancy school and start all over again! Me, if you please! Me!

JANET. Well? And what of it? One should never be too old or too proud to learn. One's mind should always be receptive to ideas and theories! (*Moving away R.*) As for me, I feel that I've been living in darkness all these years; (*turning, at R., to face COOK*) but now, at last, I've seen the light! Naomi has shown it to me!

COOK. Yes, madam. (*Moving below the chair, L. of the table.*) I rather fancy she's shown me a bit of a light, too—and so far as I can see, it's a red one.

JANET. What d'you mean?

(*COOK shrugs.*)

I think you're being very foolish, Cook, very.

COOK. I can't help what you think! And as for me, I feel as though I'd been told to go out into the fields and eat grass! Yes, I do!

JANET. Well, and why not? Certain grasses have a definite nutritive value, and are not unpalatable. Naomi says so.

COOK (*losing control*). Naomi says so! Naomi says so! If

you ask me, that woman'll say anything, so long as it's daft enough !

(JANET gasps.)

JANET (*also losing control.*) *What's that ? What's that ? (Taking a pace in, towards R.C.)* Why—why, Cook, how dare you ! How dare you speak of a guest in this house as “that woman” ? Really, this is too much !

COOK (*much louder ; taking a pace towards the table.*) That—that grass-eating old cow, then, if you prefer it !

(IRIS appears in the doorway. As she does so, we hear the sound of a woman's laughter, high-pitched and uncontrolled, from the direction of the kitchen. It should not be too loud or obtrusive, and must suggest that the kitchen door is closed.)

IRIS. Madam—madam . . .

JANET (*not seeing IRIS ; to COOK.*) Hold your tongue, will you ! You're being both rude and unreasonable, and I won't have it !

IRIS. Madam . . .

JANET. If I choose to turn vegetarian, that is entirely my affair !

COOK. And what I cook and where I cook it is *my* affair !

JANET. I have every right, I should hope, in my own house, to make whatever plans I choose !

COOK. So have I—and I've made 'em—Ashby-de-la-Zouche !

JANET. What !

COOK (*almost shouting.*) Ashby-de-la-Zouche !

JANET. I warn you, Cook ! Now, I warn you, quite seriously—if you start using filthy language, I shall at once send for the police !

IRIS (*much louder ; moving in to up R.C.*). Madam—madam, oh, please !

JANET (*suddenly aware of IRIS ; distractedly.*) Yes—yes, Iris—what is it ? What is it ?

IRIS. You're wanted in the kitchen—at once, please.

JANET. Why ? What ? (*Catching the sound of the offstage laughter.*) What's that noise out there ? What's Miss Wavertree laughing at ?

IRIS. She isn't laughing ! She's having hysterics !

JANET. She's *what* ?

IRIS. Having hysterics, good and proper ! And I'm to pack her bag immediately, and Ivy's calling a taxi, and the master says liver and bacon for lunch, and no nonsense !

JANET. Bags ? Taxis ? Liver and bacon ? What in God's name ? Has everybody in this house gone mad ?

(*She brushes past IRIS and hurries out.*)

(*Off.*) Naomi—Naomi—darling . . .

(*IRIS turns to follow JANET out.*)

COOK (*in a loud urgent whisper*). Hey ! Hey, Iris ! What's happened ? What's up ?

IRIS (*checking and turning*). Up ? Seven hundred of the best are up ! Right up the spout ! (*She moves to go.*)

COOK. Here—wait a minute—Iris !

(*But IRIS has gone out up R., slamming the door behind her. COOK's mood has made a quick change to one of half-stunned bewilderment. She stares wide-eyed at the closed door, then hurries to it and, facing down stage, presses her ear against it, straining to catch any sound. A door bangs off stage. COOK starts, and moves hurriedly from the door to above the table. The door opens, and IVY, flushed and breathless, bursts in.*)

COOK. Ivy.

IVY (*coming up R.C.*). Phoo ! I'm not half puffed ! Had to run all the blinking way to the Earl's Court Road for a taxi. (*Moving down R., panting.*) I got her a lovely one, though, and it's got a bunch of paper flowers in a little vawse, ever so nice, and . . .

COOK. But *who* wants a taxi ? *Who* ? Ivy, tell me at once, what's going on in this house ?

(*Before IVY can reply, IRIS enters. She is carrying a small chopping-board on which is a little pile of what looks like minced-up vegetable matter. IVY moves in to just below the easy-chair.*)

IRIS (*entering*). My !—but there's a nasty temper for you, eh ? Won't let me do her packing ! Sooner do it herself ! And her and madam going at it hammer and tongs ! And the master like a raging lion ! I'd never have thought he had it in him—would you ?

COOK (*almost pathetically*). But—Iris—what's it all about ? I don't . . . (*Pointing to the chopping-board.*) And what have you got there ?

IRIS (*R. of the table*). This ? (*Holding it aloft ; gaily.*) Just a few flowers that will *not* bloom in the Spring—tra, la, la ! (*Putting the board down on the table and pointing to it.*) Not a

quarter of an hour ago, *that* was worth seven hundred pounds ; and now, there isn't a living soul'd give you sevenpence for it !

COOK (*staring at IRIS, then at the chopping-board*). Eh ?

IRIS. The tulip-bulbs the master had stored away at the back of the top shelf in the kitchen ! There they are, Cook old girl, chopped up for onions ! What d'you think of that ?

COOK (*speechless for a moment ; then, cwestricken*). Cor ! Blimey ! Chase me round a fun-fair ! Iris, it isn't true ? No, *never* ! Never !

IRIS. As I stand here ! And if the master ever again hears the word "vegetarian" uttered in this house, he says he'll wreck the place !

COOK. Good for him ! (*She moves towards the sofa, then turns.*)

IRIS (*during COOK's move*). And—and don't forget, Cook—it's liver and bacon for lunch. (*She moves above the table.*)

COOK (*moving in front of the sofa*). Good for us ! (*Suddenly, she starts to chuckle.*) You know—young Ivy over there was right—it *has* been a funny sort of morning !

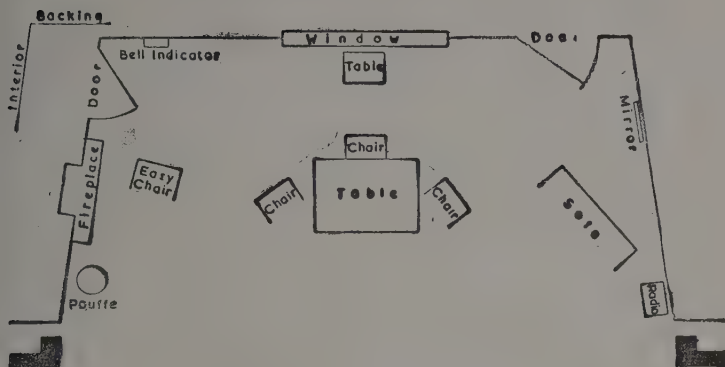
The chuckle grows and swells into loud, full-throated laughter.

Collapsing upon the sofa, she rocks to and fro, shaken by an uncontrollable paroxysm of gargantuan mirth. The next moment, IRIS, too, is infected, has flopped down upon the chair at the back of the table, and is laughing helplessly, her head thrown back, her arms hanging loosely at her sides. By the fireplace, IVY, openly, mouthed and completely bewildered, her head craned forward, is standing staring at the two, as—

CURTAIN

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT.

Area Backing



Carpet on stage. Rug at fire-place. Curtains at windows.
 Pictures, as described. (*Victorian romantic and battle scenes.*)
 Square table. On it : Table cloth. 3 cups of tea and biscuits. Tea pot.
 Milk jug. Sugar bowl. Newspaper.
 3 straight-backed chairs at table.
 Easy-chair.
 Sofa. Sofa cushions.
 Pouffe.
 Small table with fern. (*At window.*)
 Radio cabinet.
 Wall mirror. (*Up L.*)
 Bell indicator. (*Up R.*)
 Metal tray. (*Above sofa.*)
 On mantelshelf : A clock. Some ornaments.
 Ready off-stage R. : Small chopping board, with "chopped onions" on it.
 Sound effect :—Crockery crash.

LIGHTING

Floats : All circuits at $\frac{1}{2}$.
Battens : All circuits at full. (*If a white circuit is included this should be checked down a little.*)
Interior backing : Amber and white lengths.
"Area" exterior backing : White, checked down to $\frac{1}{2}$.
 No CUES.

PHILIP JOHNSON

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Samuel French Ltd

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